

“Concerning Japanese Origins”

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Young Japanese women of the upper class
(Malayo-Polynesian type) taking tea

“Concerning Japanese Origins”

Messieurs, from the very first days of my sojourn in Japan I had been impressed by the tropical nature of certain customs and habits of the islanders inhabiting the Land of the Rising Sun: habits and customs which are not much in harmony with the land in which they live. In this manner, notwithstanding the Chinese influences to which the architecture of Japan has submitted, Japanese houses and cottages involuntarily summon up the memory of the much more primitive dwellings of the Dayaks of Borneo. The disposition that the Japanese, especially those belonging to the lower classes, have of doing without clothes during the summer season, a disposition which the current government combats with decrees and regulations enforced by the police, cannot be native to a land where, though its latitudes mostly fall below those of Gibraltar and Syracuse, one encounters the temperatures of northern Italy and northern France: it clearly seems to me to be a reminiscence of a prehistoric period whose seat of action was some tropical island region or area on continental Asia. Furthermore, the practice of tattooing is developed to such an extent that it makes one presume that the ancestors of the Japanese were in the habit of being scantily clad, and the example of the Japanese on this matter may serve as new evidence supporting the thesis advanced by several distinguished ethnologists, namely: that tattooing is a custom of the naked man. The upper classes of Japan, who have for centuries dressed in a manner similar to that of the continental peoples of eastern Asia, had abandoned the practice of tattooing themselves well before today's reform-minded government had thought about prohibiting it; but, the running footmen, who pull small carriages and take the place of hackney-coaches in the streets and on the roadways of the Empire of the Rising Sun—in a word, those individuals whose profession obliges them to be seen naked in public still appear to this day completely covered with arabesques and drawings, from the chest down to the knees. All these considerations, combined with the well-known fact that the Japanese language is only superficially connected to the group of idioms of continental Asia, seem to me to indicate with sufficient clarity that our Orientalists have gone astray in representing to us the nationality of the Land of the Rising Sun as an appendage of the great Chinese nation, more or less modified by Ainu influences.

Since Kaempfer, travellers to Japan have unanimously recognized that the Japanese nation does not have a visible quality of ethnic homogeneity. Dickson, the Englishman, appears to me to be the one who has most successfully traced the two extreme types between which they oscillate, that is to say, the entire Japanese physiognomy. There is the well-known type, possessing prominent cheekbones, square face, and flat nose, on the one hand; on the other, there is a

less known type that possesses a dolichocephalic skull, head shaped like an elongated oval, projecting nose that is quasi-aquiline, and a quite overwhelming alveolar-subnasal prognathism. This same author has observed with good reason that this type, which I shall call the *Malayo-Polynesian* type, faithfully represented in Japanese prints, is manifestly linked to the idea that the Japanese form the most noble race, a race of distinction and beauty; whereas the type with the prominent cheekbones, or that which people commonly call the *Mongol* type, is the plebeian or vulgar type depicted in Japanese prints. I shall add that I have not often encountered in Japan living representatives of the aristocratic type in all its purity; whereas it is certainly the dominant type in a large part of the former kingdom of Ryukyu (or Luchu). Throughout the Land of the Rising Sun the most perfect representatives of the Malayo-Polynesian type will be, in my opinion, members of the Shimazu family, princes of Satsuma.

The chronicles of Japan inform us that in 660 B.C. the kingdom of Yamato (which subsequently became the Japanese Empire) was founded, in the central part of the large island, by a conqueror that we have come to know under the Chinese pseudonym Jimmu Tenno (Divine Warrior). I believe I have pointed out in my book, *L'empire japonais* (1878), that this pseudonym, in the same way as all the deification titles of the emperors of Japan, was only invented much later, in the image of the posthumous titles of the Chinese emperors. The national name under which this founder of the Japanese dynasty is mentioned in the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters), the most ancient document on Japanese history that has made its way to our times, is Kami Yamato Ihare-biko; but, above all when it comes to Japan, such names are unable to furnish us any indication about the provenance of this hero nor about the nationality of the enemies against whom he made battle.

Tradition tells us that the founder of the Japanese Empire was a more or less direct descendant of “the Goddess who brightens the sky” (Amaterasu); that his ancestors inhabited the “highest valley in heaven” (Takamagahara) until a time came when the great-grandfather of the fifth generation of heroes in question deigned to descend to Takatriho, which is the name of one of the summits of the volcanic massif of Kirishima, located in the southwest part of the island of Kyushu. It must be observed that this particular spot of Japanese territory, by its geographical position, is inaccessible to settlers from the Asian mainland who have always followed a well-known route: from Korea across the Strait of Tsushima, landing along the northwest coast of Kyushu, especially at the bay which today still bears the characteristic name of *Kara tomari* (harbor of the Chinese). The above-mentioned heroes, on the contrary, moved along the eastern seaboard of Kyushu, then passed through the Inland Sea until reaching the gulf of Osaka, at which point they disembarked in order to venture into the

interior. In this manner the route known to be taken by the creators of the Japanese Empire strictly coincides with the Kuroshio, the great “black current” of the Pacific Ocean. It seems to me quite permissible to conjecture that in order to reach the Yamato Plain the ancestors of Jimmu would have done like him, that is to say, after leaving Formosa they had been led hither by this same black current, aided probably by winds from the southwest, which regularly blow in these waters during the summer monsoons. By accepting this hypothesis, one can easily conceive how the Malayo-Polynesian type, entirely distinct from the Mongol and Ainu, is attached in the representation of Japanese to the idea of aristocracy, nobility, and conquest.

As for those elements of the Japanese nationality gained through conquest, local historical accounts are very explicit and are not lost in conjectures. They disclose to us that there were in ancient times two species of barbarians living in the archipelago of the Rising Sun: the barbarians of the West, or *Kumaso* (troop of bears), identical to the populations who have figured under this same name in the ancient history of Korea, and the hairy barbarians of the East, the *Yemisi*, the name people in Japan bestow today upon the Ainus of the northern islands. I have recounted in my book as to how the Kumaso, vanquished by the descendant of the “Goddess who brightens the sky” (whereas their kings had descended from the Wind Spirit), retired to the province of Izumo, where they established a kingdom that the Japanese designated with the name of *Néno-Kouni* (land of roots), because it harbored the grains of the “five cereals,” whose cultivation formed the base of the Empire’s national wealth. This kingdom maintained its independence up to the 2nd Century A.D. It was only after Prince Yamato-takeru had pacified these barbarians of Izumo that the Japanese risked invading Korea, where they made their first conquest under the Empress Jingō, the Semiramis of the Far East, who the Chinese annals have mentioned by name as *Pimiku*. But here we fall into the domain of history.

I shall therefore pause for now, though I should mention that the struggle the Japanese engaged in with the Ainus, their *Drang nach Osten*, did not commence until much later. Accordingly, it must be supposed that at the time when some unknown subdivisions of Malayo-Polynesian tribes proceeded to establish the kingdom of Yamato in the center of Japan’s large island, they had conquered earlier the Kumaso of Korea, having already exterminated or expelled the Ainus from this part of their territory.

DUSCUSSION

Professor JEAN LOUIS ARMAND DE QUATREFAGES. I listened with keen interest to your presentation, Monsieur Mechnikov. The points you raise

support the opinions that I have professed for a long time, and you have made them at a time when the opinions universally embraced with respect to the Japanese populations are substantially different from those that I have believed necessary to adopt. This leads me to offer some observations.

The English have been neither the first nor the only ones to regard the Japanese as being ethnically comprised of different types. Taking into account the facts that Kaempfer and Sieboldt have uncovered, I have for a long time entertained this opinion. I have distinguished three ethnic stocks in Japan that I have been able to attribute to the three fundamental types of human races: the black, the yellow and the white. Furthermore, I have shown that in Japan these types are more juxtaposed than blended.

For over five years I have expounded in my lectures and treatises these estimations and the facts upon which they rest. Indeed, I have briefly summarized them on various occasions in several publications, among others in a very detailed Introduction to a *Histoire general des races humaines*, a large publishing project intended by Monsieur Duvergier, Sr., but which has not yet been realized.

In my *Rapport sur les progress de l'anthropologie en France* (1867), the Japanese appear as an example of *racess with anthropological elements juxtaposed* in the table listing large mixed races connected more or less to the yellow parent-stock.

Years later, after my report's publication, Monsieur Vivien de Saint-Martin, in insisting upon the existence of a white component in the Far East, became reconciled to my point of view.

Most recently Monsieur Guimet, on his return from his journey to Japan, repeated that the population is a mixture and presents to a high degree the juxtaposition of types.

Different foreign publications have more and more confirmed what I have said on this subject. Above all, the descriptions and engravings of Messieurs Fah and Green appearing in the account of the American expedition made under the command of Commodore Perry can be cited.

The observations of Monsieur Mechnikov have come once again to the support of the conclusions that result from the preceding facts.

In addition, messieurs, in a paper on the Negritos, published in the first

first volume of the *Revue d'anthropologie* (1872), I demonstrated that a Japanese skull from Doctor Broca's collection displays the essential characteristics of the Negrito race attenuated only by cross-breeding. This anatomical fact, which is in agreement with the details provided by the aforementioned authors of old, established beyond any doubt the ancient existence in Japan of a Negro element. However, this element seems to be the most attenuated and diluted of all. I must note, though, that it appears less effaced or inconspicuous in the archipelago of Luchu, judging from some of the details furnished by Basil Hall and his travel companions.

Monsieur Mechnikov allows for the introduction of the yellow element into Japan, at least in two different époques, of which one occurred prior to the arrival of the Chinese in these islands. This course of events is possible; but, in any case, we know that at the time when Japan wanted from China its scholars and other aspects of civilization, a great migration took place, and traces of Chinese blood naturally found their way into the population. The portraits gathered by Messieurs Fah and Green, and from what we are often able to verify ourselves, cannot leave any doubt in this regard.

But the same means of investigation reveal no less surely the presence of a white element. This element sometimes appears in a remarkably pure form. However, I do not regard this characteristic as being present in the picture of the prince of Satsuma, which you have shared with us, Monsieur Mechnikov. With him, his oblique eyes and thick lips signify a Chinese mixture. To whatever degree that one may be able to pass judgment from a photograph, there is no question that the likeness it shows can be understood to be very changeable.

The pure white type finds itself much better expressed in the third ambassador to head the Japanese embassy in Paris. In this case, all the traits are those of a white man; and, in particular, the eyes are perfectly horizontal, the lips thin and quite mobile. I must add that, by the vivacity and grace of his manners, this yellow man, belonging to one of the oldest families of Japan, completely calls to mind what we have been told about the noblemen of last century.

The existence of three types being an established fact, one must ask himself from where they may have come before arriving in Japan.

Regarding the black element, we know without any doubt that the large Negrito formation stretches from the Andamans up to the extremities of the territory of the Malay archipelagos. We find it again in Luchu. There is nothing easier than to see it managing to reach Japan.

We have witnessed how history, relatively recent, is sufficient to explain the presence in Japan of the yellow element.

As for the white element found in Japan, it is of two kinds.

The Ainus have been the earliest representatives of this element in Japan. They formerly occupied a much more extensive area than they do now. It is perhaps to this type that the pithecomorphic men observed in Sumatra by Rienzi are connected. In any case, it is evident that they were dominant in Japan. The physician to the previously-mentioned Japanese embassy, a man who I have been able to chat with thanks to the intermediation of Monsieur de Rosny, did not hesitate to affirm that they had in former times occupied the entire archipelago. One of our navy doctors, whose name I most regretfully have forgotten, told me recently that he had seen pure or half-bred Ainus all along the northwest coast of Japan. On the other hand, this white element can be met with and still probably exists fairly unmixed in the south of Japan. Indeed, in a published memoir (*Voyages de Moncatch Apé*, annotated by myself), I have shown that this race extends all the way to Luchu. In this manner one can explain the presence in these islands and in Japan of men remarkable for their light complexion and well-developed beard, as noted by various travellers.

But another vastly different element, although likewise white, has come to mingle with the preceding. It is the one which, departing from Borneo and neighboring islands to conquer all of Polynesia to the east, is widely distributed throughout various Pacific islands and archipelagos: it has been encountered in the Philippines, most notably in Mindanao by Doctor Montano. It is to this type, whose skin is always quite smooth and hairless, that I attribute the superior types that I have earlier discussed. Most likely it is this white element which, under the command of Jimmu, carried out the conquest of Japan, defeating the Ainus.

This conqueror, Jimmu, was certainly a foreigner. Some have claimed that he came from China. This is undoubtedly an error. The white origins of this warrior and his companions is attested by the physical qualities of their descendants. It is only pretension that has Jimmu being descended from two terrestrials on his father's side, and two gods of the sea on his mother's. Such a divine origin has never been assigned to any Chinese person. By contrast, we know that the Polynesian chiefs, even today, affirm that they are not only sons of gods, but are gods themselves.

Now, Monsieur Mechnikov, you have backed up several of your opinions concerning the interpretation of the mythological legends of Japan; but I have to

remark that with Jimmu we fully enter, in reality, historical times. The conquest of the Japanese archipelago by this warrior and his companions were not lost in the darkness of time, inasmuch as it took place about the middle of the 7th Century B.C. (667 B.C., according to Monsieur de Jancigny).

To summarize, I have demonstrated today that the Japanese population is composed of:

- 1) A black element of the Negrito type, nowadays probably close to being entirely blended into the general population;
- 2) A yellow element from all appearances coming mainly from China, and it is always well recognizable;
- 3) A white Ainu element, representing the population which occupied the archipelago at the time of the conquest; and
- 4) A white Indonesian element, which effectuated this conquest and can still sometimes be found in a state of purity, above all among members of the ancient nobility.

I must add that the yellow and white elements occasionally occur juxtaposed and not intermixed in any striking manner. The portraits emanating from the American expedition cannot leave any doubt in this regard.



Ainu of northwest Japan

Doctor ARTHUR BORDIER. The pathological idiosyncrasies of the Japanese race happen to support the arguments invoked by Monsieur Mechnikov and Professor de Quatrefages so as to prove the threefold origins of this population. No other population can better demonstrate the importance (till now much too unrecognized) of pathological analysis in order to characterize races. The Japanese are a mélange of three types: white, yellow and black. Now, their pathology displays the effects of this triple influence.

For example, syphilis, although it very often strikes the Chinese, does not cause much havoc with them. It is, on the contrary, a very grave affliction with the Japanese; one observes likewise its seriousness among the Malays and the black races. The grave results that the Japanese experience with syphilis is a hallmark of a race composed of Malays and black elements.

Now, messieurs, a high frequency of phthisis is predominately a negroid characteristic. It is the same with cholera: while the yellow race is rarely struck by this malady, it always inflicts more ravages among the blacks. The Japanese are also more subject to cholera, and with them it creates a condition of utmost gravity; on this point the Japanese resemble the Malayo-Polynesians.

Monsieur LEV MECHNIKOV. For my own part I have described how frequent phthisis is among the Japanese. Without hazarding a medical discussion which oversteps my competence, I wonder if this disposition to incur phthisis indicates that their lungs are not adapted to the climate of their country.

Doctor ERNEST HAMY. I am disposed, Monsieur Mechnikov, to believe that the practice of wearing tattoos must have been borrowed by the Japanese from the Ainus. Moreover, are there not affinities between the Japanese tattooing and that which is in common use on both shores of the Bering Strait?

Niedendorf, in his work on the Siberian peoples, states that they engage in tattooing and in particular decorate the face with a design that runs from the corner of the mouth to the outer angle of the eyelids. Now, certain diggings executed by Monsieur Pinart demonstrate that this practice likewise permeated the Aleutian Islands; one sees in his collection a mask that bears this kind of ornamentation.

Tattooing is therefore also a northern custom.

Monsieur LEV MECHNIKOV. I do not attribute great importance to the parenthetical remarks that I broached initially regarding the origins of tattooing

in Japan. The arabesques that the Ainu women tattoo on themselves can be found as well among Japanese women, but these resemblances in ornamentation do not prove a common origin, because these embellishments are easy to imagine and conceive.

Doctor ANTOINE FOLEY. In every civilized society one finds two distinct types: a vulgar, common type and a noble type.

Now, the following three types of mankind exist, which correspond to the levels of civilization:

- 1) The *black* or *vegetative* type;
- 2) The *yellow* or *muscular* type; and
- 3) The *white* or *mental* type.

Whenever man is not free *vegetatively*, that is to say, when the need to eat still dominates all his thoughts and movements, he is as dark as the temperature and the sunshine level of his country permit him to be.

Whenever he is free *vegetatively*, but not yet free *muscularly*, his skin is colored *yellow*, red, or greenish, in conformance with the kind of cutaneous secretion that his climate demands.

Lastly, whenever man is free vegetatively and muscularly, he is *white*.

It is, moreover, possible that in a particular society the first of these types has disappeared, or that the third has not yet made its appearance, and that the society in question exists in a state of transition from one type to another.

Such is the theory which seems to me, Monsieur Mechnikov, to account for the mixture of types in Japan that you have pointed out and which I have also observed, to a different degree, in Polynesia.

Monsieur LEV MECHNIKOV. Your theory, Doctor Foley, appears to me to be as debatable and as admissible as many others. However, here is something for you to ponder: why is the aristocratic type of Japan more prognathous than the common types in this country?

Professor EUGÈNE DALLY. Japan is currently the theater of an extremely brusque social revolution, which consists of introducing by decrees

western civilization into the country and which has as its author the nation's sovereign, the Mikado himself.

Monsieur Bousquet, who has written up the history of this rapid transformation, has wondered if this revolution will subsist, or whether it will only end up being considered a short-lived event.

As far as I am concerned, I doubt that a people can undergo such a revolution without being destroyed in part or absorbed by a foreign conqueror.

I therefore request you, Monsieur Mechnikov, to tell us if you think that the revolution attempted by the sovereign of Japan for the sake of transforming the manners, customs, and civilization of his country is likely, after his departure, to leave behind new, durable institutions.

Monsieur LEV MECHNIKOV. This revolution is less sudden than you have deemed, Professor Dally. Already by the 17th Century Japan was in the process of turning into a European state.

The revolution with which we are assisting today is only the natural fruit of the ideas of civilization that for a long time already possessed deep roots in Japan.

The Japanese take to these ideas most remarkably. For example, it is known that the Russians, who for three centuries have already occupied part of the Far East, avail themselves of Japan as if it were a center of civilization. If a Russian ship finds itself damaged and experiencing some serious difficulties in Northeast Asian waters, it is to a Japanese port that it will seek out repairs. It is true that the Japanese have borrowed from French engineers and others the technical knowledge which they presently possess, but they have sufficiently mastered it so as to be able to henceforth do without the guidance and direction of European engineers.

Professor EUGÈNE DALLY. I cannot believe, Monsieur Mechnikov, that the instruction provided by the Jesuits in Japan during the 17th Century produced in this country deep roots of European civilization.

Their influence has only been of brief duration. It does not explain the sudden establishment in Japan of the French Civil Code, nor the strict government regulation of how people can dress, an example of which is the stipulation that a frock-coat in the French fashion must be worn during official ceremonies.

There is no historical precedent indicating that such an abrupt and complete revolution has ever been durable.

Monsieur GIRARD DE RIALLE. I must disagree with you, Professor Dally. Yes, this precedent exists, and we find it in the history of Japan itself, when the Chinese abruptly introduced their civilization into the islands of the Orient.

Doctor GUSTAVE LE BON. I entirely share the ideas that you have proffered, Professor Dally, and consider that trying to impose on a people who have attained a fixed evolutionary level a civilization belonging to an entirely different stage of evolution is just as impossible as compelling an aquatic animal to breathe air before it has had time to develop gills. There is no example in history where a superior race has succeeded in imposing its civilization upon a race intellectually situated a great distance below it. Two peoples occupying neighboring phases of evolution, the Chinese and Japanese, for example, can reciprocally influence each other, but it will be altogether otherwise if these peoples prove to be at very different evolutionary stages. Japan exemplifies precisely this latter situation. Attempting to force on an entirely feudalistic people a Code adapted to the needs of very different peoples, in a word, to impose institutions which oblige them to completely break with their past, this is to ignore the most fundamental laws of the evolution of societies and to prepare the people upon whom this experiment is performed for an extremely painful and sad future. I have had occasion to research the case of Japan, and in my work: *l'Homme et les Sociétés, leurs Origines et leur Histoire*, I have presented it as an example typifying the results that can emanate from the ignorance of certain fundamental sociological laws.

Monsieur LEV MECHNIKOV. You must not take too seriously the introduction of the Civil Code in Japan, Doctor Le Bon. Its use is not obligatory. However much it has been adopted officially, it is in place mainly for the sake of accommodating the motives of foreign politics. The Japanese are afraid of the interference of the consuls in the dealings that they have with Europeans, and have desired to put in the way of any attempts at foreign intervention the existence of a European Code in their land.

A couple of minutes ago Monsieur de Rialle noted the abrupt transition which might have occurred in Japan during the time period spanning the last-appearing mythological stories and earliest historical accounts. I have not found this transition to be as abrupt and sudden as you have contended, Monsieur de Rialle. However, there is a reason why history followed all at once after the legends: it was the introduction of writing and that of the Chinese

practice of recording and maintaining annals of countries. This practice was ushered in very late. Accordingly, the history of Japan is in arrears by eleven centuries over that of other peoples. It is up to us to restore it for our own improvement, and to accomplish this anthropology can be of great assistance to us.